

all taxpayers should pay what you owe. We should also all agree that we need to reduce our deficit, simplify the tax-filing process, and promote a fair and equitable tax system. The START Act of 2006 is intended to make progress on all of these goals. I hope it can start a civil conversation about ways to improve our tax system. I look forward to working with all interested parties to craft a workable proposal that provides some needed relief to our overburdened taxpayers.

GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. REED. Mr. President, today I recognize the 185th anniversary of Greek independence, which will be celebrated on Saturday, March 25.

As the Greek philosopher Plato said “The beginning is the most important part of the work.” After centuries of unsuccessful uprisings and failure of the Ottoman Empire to assimilate and convert the Greeks, the War of Independence began on this day, March 25 in 1821. This was the beginning of the end of 400 years of occupation and oppression by the Ottoman Turks. During the dark years of the Ottoman occupation, thousands were killed and tortured for participating in religious activities or teaching their children culture, history, and language. The steadfast resolve displayed by the Greeks helped secure their independence and recognition as a sovereign power nearly 11 years later with the signing of the Treaty of Constantinople.

This struggle for Greek independence was recognized the world over and was supported abroad by prominent world figures including Lord Byron of England, and Daniel Webster and Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe of the United States.

As we fight today’s Long War on Terror, the Greeks stand by our side. A highlight of the Greek military’s continuing contributions to the International Coalition was the deployment of the 229th Mobile Field Surgical Hospital deployed to Afghanistan. At full operational status within 3 days, medical experts and officials believe the 229th is one of the best medical facilities that has ever operated in Afghanistan.

A Greek proverb says, “Success isn’t how far you got, but the distance you traveled from where you started.” Still alive and well in our own society today are the principles and ideas of ancient Greece. When we commemorate the heroism exhibited by the Greeks, we cannot help but to think of our Founding Fathers. Then and now, Greece and the United States share an absolute commitment to democracy, justice, and freedom. In history the Greeks have inspired, and in the present they have enlivened our great Nation. It gives me great pleasure and pride to cosponsor the Senate Resolution 399 designating March 25, 2006, as Greek Independence Day: A National Day of Celebration of Greek and American Democracy. I send all Greek-Americans

in Rhode Island and around the country my best wishes as they celebrate their ancestral homeland’s independence.

SUNSHINE WEEK 2006

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, as we take stock during the second annual Sunshine Week, we confront the disturbing reality that the foundations of our open government are under direct assault from the first White House in modern times that is openly hostile to the public’s right to know.

The right to know is a cornerstone of our democracy. Without it, citizens are kept in the dark about key policy decisions that directly affect their lives. Without open government, citizens cannot make informed choices at the ballot box. Without access to public documents and a vibrant free press, officials can make decisions in the shadows, often in collusion with special interests, escaping accountability for their actions. And once eroded, these rights are hard to win back.

The right to know is nourished by openness and vigorous congressional oversight of Federal agencies, but both are sorely lacking, and government effectiveness and accountability have been among the casualties. The disastrous failure to prepare for and respond to Hurricane Katrina is only the most recent example, but a glaring one. Despite misleading assertions in the storm’s horrific aftermath, we now know that the White House was warned in advance that the levees could fail in a hurricane. We have belatedly seen videotapes in which President Bush was cautioned by FEMA officials of this great danger.

The Freedom of Information Act, FOIA, empowers the American people to pry information from their Government that agencies would prefer to keep locked away. Americans learned more about Abu Ghraib and conditions at Guantanamo from FOIA requests than from oversight by Congress.

As we celebrate FOIA’s fourth decade as law, we also watch its erosion as a target of attacks such as when the administration pushed an overly broad FOIA waiver for the Department of Homeland Security’s charter the single biggest rollback of FOIA in its 40-year history.

It has been nearly a decade since Congress has approved major reforms to the Freedom of Information Act. Last year during Sunshine Week, Senator CORNYN and I introduced bipartisan legislation, S.394, to curtail the assault on FOIA. The Open Government Act contains more than a dozen substantive provisions, designed to strengthen FOIA and close loopholes, to help FOIA requestors obtain timely responses to their requests, to ensure that agencies have strong incentives to act on FOIA requests, and to provide FOIA officials with all of the tools they need to make sure that our government remains open and accessible.

A second bill that I introduced with Senator CORNYN last year, the Faster FOIA Act, S.589, would specifically address the issue of agency delay in processing FOIA requests. We propose to establish a commission to review the persistent issue of delay and to make recommendations for reducing impediments to the efficient processing of requests. This bill was reported by the Judiciary Committee and awaits floor action.

Our free press and the consciences of whistleblowers also serve the public’s right to know. We would not know of the domestic spying program conducted in secret by the National Security Agency, with the full approval of the White House, unless the press had revealed it last December. The Department of Justice is stonewalling Congress’s efforts to obtain facts on this program while threatening to prosecute reporters who disclosed the illegal program to the public.

The Bush administration has kept vital facts secret by silencing scientists and experts. We saw it with the gagging of NASA scientist James Hansen, whose conclusions about the dangers of greenhouse gas emissions and global warming differed with administration policy. This administration also secretly let lobbyists from polluting industries write rules on mercury emissions, overriding the advice of the EPA’s scientists and even drawing a harsh rebuke from EPA’s inspector general. This tacit war on science—trumping scientific evidence with ideology—has also victimized women’s access to the Plan B pill and cut international family planning funds which help the poorest of the poor, even though the evidence is clear that these funds reduce the numbers of abortions.

This kind of secrecy produces bad policies, as we saw when the Bush administration tried to hide the true cost of its Medicare prescription drug plan from Congress and the American people. While they were twisting congressional arms for votes on the program, political leaders at Medicare told Congress the price tag was \$400 billion. Medicare’s own accountants projected the cost to be \$500 billion to \$600 billion, but one of those career staff, Richard Foster, was threatened with being fired if he told Congress the truth.

We saw it again when the political leadership of the Justice Department overruled career lawyers who found that Congressman TOM DELAY’s Texas redistricting plan illegally diluted Black and Hispanic voting power. Career attorneys also found that a Georgia voter-identification law would discriminate against Black voters. The Department’s political leaders dismissed these findings and quietly approved both plans. We only learned of these politically motivated decisions later when the press obtained documents and made them public.

In a situation that borders on the absurd, the intelligence agencies have